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WHERE GOD MEETS MAN
Psalm 77
Romans 8:35-39

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The following is taken from a cover article in Time Magazine (April 8, 1966, P. 82):

"Is God dead? It is a question that tantalizes both believers, who perhaps secretely fear that he is, and atheists, who possibly suspect that the answer is no.

Is God dead? The three words represent a summons to reflect on the meaning of existence.

HYDROGEN & CARBON. To those who do formulate a God, he seems to be every thing from a celestial gas to a kind of invisible honorary president "out there" in space, well beyond range of the astronauts. A young Washington scientist suggests that "God, if anything, is hydrogen and carbon. Then again, he might be thermonuclear fission, since that's what makes life on this planet possible." To a streetwalker in Tel Aviv, "God will get me out of this filth one day. He is a God of mercy, dressed all in white and sitting on a golden throne." A Dutch charwoman says: "God is a ghost floating in space." Screenwriter Edward Anhalt (Becket) says that "God is an infantile fantasy, which was necessary when men did not understand what lightning was. God is a cop-out," A greek janitor thinks that God is "like a firey flame, so white that it can blind you." "God is all that I cannot understand," says a Roman seminarian. A Boston scientist describes God as "The totality of harmony in the universe." Playwright Alfred muses: "It is the voice which says, "It's not good enough - that's what God is."

Even though we know better, plenty of Christians find it hard to do away with ideas of God as a white-bearded father figure. William McCleary of Philadelphia, a Roman Catholic civil servant, sees God "a lot like he was explained to us as children. As an older man, who is just and who can get angry at us. I know this isn't the true picture, but it's the only one I've got."

share a cup remember me. Not just in the current ritualized version - but whenever you break bread. That makes every meal a sacrament: that makes all wine a symbol of his presence, not just Welch's unfermented grape juice.

The whole idea of worship is that it helps us observe and celebrate a reality that we discover the other six days of the week: it begins on the premise that God is out there in our relationships, our jobs, our politics, our families, our loving - and that on a regular basis we have to get together to celebrate it.

I don't think I ever had an experience that so vividly portrayed that truth as a small worship experience I was privileged to participate in last Sunday morning.

The Session of this Church was at Geneva Center and as you were getting ready to come to church we found ourselves sitting in a circle in a small meeting room looking out on a crisp, white January morning. To say that we were uncomfortable is to put it mildly. There we were - in sweaters and slacks, no organ, no choir, no sermon, no pewes, no bulletins, no liturgy. A group of Christians being asked to do a very simple thing - to worship God. And without those things regarded as sacred - as 11 secular people, forced to think about the meaning of worship, we were scared. I know I would rather have preached a sermon to a thousand people, without notes, but with robe and pulpit to hide behind rather than walk into that room of people to worship.

Well, somehow for me - and I think for most of us, it worked. We filled up an hour. We shared some thoughts, some reading, we stumbled through some prayers, we even sang a little, we thought about the rest of you, we passed a piece of bread around and reflected onwhat it reminded us of: we all shook hands and then went back to business. And as I reflect on it, it was one of the most vivid moments in my life in terms of sensing the reality and power and love of God. Because he's there all the time:

God: by pointing to those places along the way where men in the past have sensed that they were dealing with the Holy, the other, the God and Father of Abraham, Issac and Jesus Christ. Therefore, if your need this morning is for a tight little theological package: for a set of simple answers to complex questions, this sermon isn't going to do much for you. If, on the other hand, you are struggling with some very basic matter - such as the existence of God - this sermon is aimed at supporting that struggle.

A beginning point might be to explore the reasons for the current predicament. How did we get so totally secular? What ever happened to the faith of our fathers?

As usual, it's a long story, but at the risk of treating history irresponsibly I will condense it. Our Hebrew ancestors knew nothing about our concepts of secular and sacred. God alone was holy, but God was so much a part of the common life that everything else was holy as well. Israel had tabernacles, and rituals and temples and synagogues - but these were not regarded as the places and things of religion ~~out~~over against the rest of life which was non-religious or secular. Rather, the temple was the place where something permanent was celebrated. God was a part of all of life, and in the temple he was specifically recognized and worshipped. Israel's law was not a religious law per se - it was simply the law - both secular and sacred. The kings of Israel were regarded as God's annointed, and when they strayed from the will of God, a prophet who was one of the people would quickly remind them of the error of their ways.

Compare that, for instance,with the way things were in the Middle Ages. By that point in time, the sacred and the secular were totally separated. On the one hand the realm of the sacred was represented by a powerful institution - the Church, with great wealth, armies, buildings, and masses of people in its ranks. On the other hand the secular was represented by the crown - also wealthy, powerful, with armies, buildings

than others, because the Bible holds out for a God who is Lord of all creation: and whose presence inhabits all places and all times. Nothing is specifically sacred - because everything is sacred. Several years ago vandals broke into this building and did some rather unpleasant things. In reporting the incident the newspaper used the word "desecrate" i.e. the sanctuary of this church was made unsacred by what took place in it. Now, fortunately newspapers don't hire theologians to write the news. Yet the use of the word "desecrate" illustrates my point. In the Biblical idiom it is no more desecrating a man's house: it is no more sacriligious to do certain things here than to do them anywhere else. Because God inhabits his world - not just those spaces we design and build to celebrate his presence.

The Bible is both secular and sacred. Secular, in that it takes man seriously: it confronts the bitter sweet nature of man's life: it deals with everyday concerns.

Think about the Psalm which I read this morning: Number 77. It was written by a man who was pretty anxious: "up-tight" to use the vernacular. We don't know what it was that made him that way, but when he speaks we can sense his honesty, because we've been there-:=

"I think of God and I sigh;
I meditate and I feel discouraged
He doesn't let me sleep:
I am so worried that I cannot speak.
I think of days gone by
and remember years of long ago
I spend the night in deep thought:
I meditate, and this is what I ask myself:
'Will the Lord always reject me?
Will he never again be pleased with me?
Has he stopped loving me?"